

Review of: "Active Peacebuilding as a Challenging Task of the Catholic Social Ethics"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

COMMENT

I have little idea of the motivation that has inspired the author to write this piece. I see that the author has had a career in religious practice, and has a deep commitment to the Catholic religion. And the author certainly has reviewed a great deal of the Catholic literature on the matter of the sinfulness of killing.

What would it take to cast this piece in a way that would advance the general understanding of killing--whether it is always proscribed, and when, if ever, it is or should be, allowed? It would be my suggestion that a question of this sort become the central focus of this paper.

I grew up in a country in which killing, though customarily disallowed, was facilitated in a variety of ways. Guns, the principal instrument of killing, were widely produced, purchased, collected, and employed by a large proportion of the population. Wars to advance national and economic interests trained and employed a fair number of the nation's youth to use an ever widening set of destructive weaponry. Disease and ill health were widely tolerated among the poor, leading to the early death of those denied the quality of nutrition and comfort enjoyed by societal majorities.

I grew up in the Catholic Church, which I came to experience as being as biased and corrupt as many other corporate organizations in society. Like my father, the distinguished educator William Van Til, I tolerated my mother's religious faith and was angered by the means in which a priestly elite sought to control the educational choices she made for the guidance of her children. As she approached the 100th year of her life, I saw Beatrice Blaha Van Til reject the religion that was so dear to her in the face of the disclosure of widespread and abominable sexual abuse by members of the religious profession.

In midlife, I began to attend Quaker meeting, but never accepted as doctrinaire any ideology I might have heard from my fellow members. I prided myself, as I still do by means of zoom-based participation, in being an active, but also atheistic, member of the Society of Friends. Like many of my friends and associates around the world, I am abashed by how I contribute to killing by paying taxes to a society that freely allows gun use, sometimes takes the life of prisoners, advances war on a continuous basis, and deprives its poor of elemental supports for their own lives and those of their children. To be sure, I have not directly killed, but my citizenly acquiescence has certainly involved me in the process.

So, what of this 5th commandment discussed by the author? Certainly, it can be taken literally, as the author believes it is

by Quakers, as something to be always literally obeyed. Why, perhaps because it is seen as a statement of “The God” referred to at the beginning of the abstract, probably in an excusable inelegance of the use of the second language by the author. But, my experience with Quakers indicates no unitary God, but rather for most members a willingness to think seriously about what may be involved in “the good”.

And maybe that's where we should go with this discussion. Sure, killing is almost always nasty and messy and to be avoided. If it's tolerated, it leads to the kind of self destruction of the good one finds not only in American society, but also in other corners of the world. And yet, some killing will be justified by many and probably will be justified by some of the readers of this comment.

Take the issue of assisted euthanasia, for example. It becomes increasingly apparent that even the most wealthy societies have no idea how to care for the increasing number of aging and increasingly dependent individuals. Costs of care increase and the quality of care plummets while the right to end one's life is rigorously denied by medical practice, papal decree, and legal proscription. Now, there's an issue to put in front of the myriad of gods and goods created by, and certainly continuing to befuddle, those of us who age, remain alive, and stand unkilld at this point in time.

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